John Stockwell: The CIA in Nicaragua

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From 1987, on CIA activities in Central America. Fidel Castro's government is discussed, along with CIA wars on Cuba, Nicaragua and more.

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good afternoon and welcome to another edition of news feature i'm corey dubin your daily host on news feature today we will present a discussion with john stockwell former cia case officer head of the angola task force and author of in search of enemies an expose of u.s involvement during the civil war in angola and cia operations around that civil war good afternoon john hi john recently you've been touring and speaking and spending a lot of time looking at and talking about the situation in central america of course one of the main focuses of the situation in central america has been the usa's not so secret war against the government of nicaragua and the support control and financing of the contras by the central intelligence agency let's talk a bit about that operation and about the cia's position and their involvement in it well the ci's technique in in nicaragua is it's a covert action it's called a destabilization it's what's done when you have a government in the capital that you don't like of a target country and you want to discomfit them or put pressure on them as reagan says which would sound you know okay if you were talking about putting pressure on the democratic party or the democratic presidential candidate but the ci's technique is to make the people of the target country so totally miserable that the social and economic fabric of the country simply tear apart and then the government can't govern and then you can make them come to terms or you know hopefully throw them out of office it's uh the simple techniques can only be described as terrorism literally rape and pillage going across the border and blowing up bridges blowing up clinics blowing up sawmills blowing up granaries

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blowing up granaries shooting fathers and then while they're dying on the ground with their family forced to watch castrating them and then putting a grenade in their mouth and pulling the pins and in some cases the opposite putting a grenade in the mouth of seven-year-old children and pulling the pen while the parents are forced to watch with the objective of just totally shocking and traumatizing the people to the point where like i say that the society just can't function and the country falls apart meanwhile you you coordinate that with pulling every international string you can to shut them off from capital from finance from cooperation of other countries and multinational corporations and the third wing the third element is propaganda you pull just pull every string you can to get articles in every element of the media to make them look bad to describe them as incompetent to describe them as as brutal if you can a totalitarian if you can to discredit their democratic processes and this all of these are being done in nicaragua they were done in chile successfully 70-73 they were done against china for 19 years without success eventually we gave up and became big friends with china and by the way that one got us into the korean war they were done in vietnam for 25 years altogether intelligence officers which led us directly into the vietnam war it was done against cuba seven years very heavily in the early 60s and then at a lesser a slower pace since then without success it didn't it stressed out cuba it uh it made castro uh and his police work harder and be what you could describe as more repressive and uh he hasn't completely lived down the international image yet but cuba is strong

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image yet but cuba is strong democratically it's strong economically so it you know it hasn't succeeded against cuba yet john in terms of the specifics of the operation in nicaragua the involvement of honduras honduras has been virtually turned into a u.s base military and central intelligence agency and how does that work the cia moves into a country how does the specifics of that operate well it isn't just cia this operation is is an obsession of the reagan government the army is deeply involved general gorman howard air force base in panama the navy is all over the place the army corps of engineers has been building what is it six bases of different kinds in honduras including airstrips including logistical bases rnr basis they you know complete with officers clubs but most particularly with the radar installations to cover the planes and shipping on the coasts the in conjunction with the build-up of honduras uh and mind you the cia is using honduras in two ways one is it's the training base for the contras and the launching point uh to send the contras into nicaragua it its function beyond that would be to manipulate to the greatest extent possible honduran politics uh to keep our position protected there and they haven't been completely successful there honduras is definitely restless under united states domination it's taken away you know any any facade of of independence on the part of honduras they're functioning like a colony now as instruments of our foreign policy that's an interesting thought john because it seems like in some ways u.s policy in countries that we consider our allies like honduras or other countries seems to be one of the main

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countries seems to be one of the main motivating forces in the development of revolutionary movements ultimately but first in the disruption of the country which tends to move uh the general population towards a more critical analysis well it's the arrogance of power it runs you know not just the third world we have a hundred bases in england and the british people you know they don't control those bases they don't have access to those bases they can't decide or control when the missiles are fired from those bases you know so the england is an occupied country to all practical purposes and honduras of course is small and weak very very poor and weak and it's just completely dominated and used by the united states this breeds bitterness it breeds revolution as walter letheber writes inevitable revolutions but the united states has been this kind of hegemony over central america for well over a hundred years now and it's continuing today and this is really what's at stake in in central america we have nicaragua has finally the first country truly to break away from united states dominion they threw out our our collaborator our puppet dictator samosa and uh established a people's republic and uh and they they you know their sincerity is well documented building clinics and hospitals and teaching people to read and write trying to get land to them very quickly coming up with an energetic enthusiastic and healthier country the salvadorian people want the same kind of freedom the ci has claimed all along that it's all caused by cuba and that the salvadorian revolution is is made possible by the flow of arms from nicaragua and this is oblivious of the true issues of course it's what what what really is coming from nicaragua is the energy of

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coming from nicaragua is the energy of the example and this is why it's desperately important our our country i i believe this i don't believe you can reach any other conclusion but to take president reagan at face value he says we will do whatever is necessary and this is the byword in washington whatever is necessary they are not able to make it with the ci and the conscious they'll put in the marines we're going to have a war in central america john two things that i want to touch on there's still some debate some in some sectors of this country we still hear in the mainstream press a difference put forth between the contras and the cia and that the cia has funded them to a degree could the contras operate and survive without the central intelligence agency and does the central intelligence agency completely control the contra operation against nicaragua well they try to control it the there's a lot at stake politically in this country and so president reagan wants the contrast controlled what's at stake it's the subtlety or the the irony if you will of the boland amendment which said that we could not the ci could not work to overthrow the sandinista government so the ci with its traditional play on words and president reagan said we're not we're just trying to interdict the flow of arms and then proceeded to arm them the contras were saying all along you know [__] we're trying to overthrow the capital managua and it's going to be a bloodbath when we make it and this is embarrassing

to reagan and so they're doing whatever they can to control and suppress not completely successfully but trying to now last spring the congress shut off the money and what the cia did reagan administration did essentially was help set up encourage them to persist saying we'll be back to you after the elections and then try to set up help them to set up alternative sources of funding to

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up alternative sources of funding to carry them over to tie them over now the recent last week's voting in congress shut off the money through next spring now uh president reagan even if he wins in a landslide he's going to have trouble getting money from the cia so they're going to have to fund them through other sources which seem to be israel and then corporations here in the states and unification church here in the state they are getting money at the rate of about a million and a half a month which is enough to keep a thing like that going if not to buy a lot of big helicopters and things you can keep the soldiers fed and bullets and the guns and keep them functioning and that will be a holding operation until the the next uh you know fiscal opportunity to increase to get another 20 000 or 50 000 unless reagan decides in the meanwhile to plunge in with the us troops and make it into a war john the other question that's been debated you mentioned a minute ago the reported flow of arms from nicaragua to el salvador it's my understanding that we have regular satellite overflights of the gulf of fonseca u2 flights a top spy ship hovering outside of the gulf and yet they've delivered no hard evidence but the administration continues to state that nicaragua is supplying the fml and fdr with arms this is it's what's known as a cover story if they had one shred of evidence they would be trumpeting it to the world on television and they don't and this is you know easy to conclude they they've tried a couple of times to say well we can't show you what we've got but you know they've shown us satellite photographs and grenada and twisted their you know their meaning they lied about them but showed us the satellite photography there's nothing that they could have documenting a flow of arms

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of arms there's a guy by the way david mcmichaels who was the analyst in the cia contract analyst who's come public i was lecturing with him jointly up in the bay area just this last week and uh he he has a very amusing but a very effective way of pointing out you know the great arms fines they they found one shipment of arms and it consisted of a hand grenade and two rifles and uh they found a mother ship unloading arms and uh it didn't you know it didn't come or go from nicaragua and uh you know and he makes the case crystal clear in fact that's why the cia did not re renew his contract is because he was asking them they were asking him to write reports about the flow of arms and he was saying what flow of arms and they were saying take our word for it and he was saying no show me you know some of the evidence and he was fighting him in that sense so they wanted to get somebody who was more amenable to the party line it's a cover story nothing more it's a cover story for aggression john let's change focus a little and and uh go from nicaragua to events in grenada the destabilization program against grenada which was well documented the ocean venture 81 and 82 military exercises that were clearly exercises looking towards an invasion of grenada what we now know is was a destabilization effort against the new jewel movement and then a u.s invasion talk a little bit about the whole grenada operation and how it fits in to what we've been discussing about nicaragua and what's happening in that part of central america and the connection of the two areas the caribbean and central america well the connection is kind of twofold president reagan and the people around him have outlined their their plan and the republican revolution the reagan revolution in this country and reshaping the world uh and

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uh and in the earliest days they talked about cleaning up our own backyard as they put it reversing the situation in grenada which they have done nicaragua which they're in the process of doing stabilizing as they call it the situation in el salvador and they talk of a military solution to the cuban problem which means an invasion of cuba and the ouster by force of fidel castro and the government of cuba now in that program grenada was both the first step and it was also the dress rehearsal to the invasion of nicaragua what you

have happened basically was in 1981 al haig proposed to put u.s troops into central america and to go the go to the source cuba would meaning a major war uh the people of this country were pulled to be 89 against it and so the department of defense in the white house would not support him and so he didn't and he was frustrated now you know we're not speculating about this he writes this in his memoirs and his frustration he couldn't get them to go along with the argument then was in 81 they would have three years before the elections to clean it up and the white house didn't see it that way in the department of defense because the people of this country weren't ready for a war and they have they have studies they even have books they've written which say about how the failure of vietnam was a failure to prepare and control the people failure to control the media's access to the war so they spent four years preparing the people and preparing laws to control the media and control the people's activities during the next war and that like grenada was a dress rehearsal very successful showy uh and very very popular exciting people with the effectiveness of a decisive military they lied about every aspect of the rationales of that thing but the lies worked the people bought it the press you know permitted it to happen and they were able to cram their rationales their their lies

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rationales their their lies down uh the world's thro the public the american public's throat if not the world's throat and now they're preparing the same scenario in nicaragua now 19 days before maurice bishop was killed i was in grenada he had invited me to move there if i chose to write books and i i decided not to do it but i was i was there i was talking to him we had drinks up at this place at mount welburn and discussed the the certainty we both felt of the united states invasion and we were looking at the indicators now we had talked on previous occasions about the sea ice destabilization of the country we did not talk at that time about the challenge that was soon to come to him uh from bernard cord and we just you know it was delicate thing we didn't get into that the timing of it was i think partly by coincidence and then partly of course when when the bodies of the u.s marines are coming back from lebanon to this country it was covered by the dramatic invasion of grenada so nobody was paying that much attention to the bodies themselves and the horror of what had happened over there and the shame not for those young men but for the reagan administration for having sacrificed them so foolishly this was masked by this dramatic showy little invasion i i am very deeply concerned uh at the winds of war i see blowing at the superficiality of this country including top editors of the new york times for example with whom i've dealt in the last week and they're saying how can you be talking about war when everybody's talking about peace well you know this is what's called playing the peace card as howard zen writes you need the people the establishment needs the people at the time of the

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needs the people at the time of the elections and then they can do what they want this duarte gesture it's no coincidence that this thing is two weeks before the our own elections here big showy thing reagan is going to go to grenada and they're going to take a long medical stu you know for the medical students who were supposedly saved they were no danger but you know we're saved and uh make a big big dog and pony show across the nation and television films of him visiting grenada and and it's going to be a very powerful thing both in terms of ensuring his popularity for the elections but also in setting up the invasion of nicaragua i think it's clear john that the whole events in el salvador were planned this way channels between the fdr fmln and duarte have been open for some time in terms of fml and fdr initiatives to duarte to talk why duarte chose to make his announcement in the united states at the united nations two weeks before the election seemed to have tipped us off who cover el salvador extensively that this was in fact decided by the reagan administration it's pretty crass it's pretty blunt well and it's incredible how well accepted it's been in this country i mean well you know the reagan administration deals with the american people the voters with with complete contempt and and they justify this contemptuous treatment by responding favorably it you don't have to read very much and you don't have to think at all to see through these kind of manipulations and the minute the fraud of the grenada thing for example and there are a lot of people who do see through it and do reject it and are upset about it and there are a lot of people who see the war coming in central america and

they're deeply upset about it but uh unfortunately you know including some some people who should know better like i say i've dealt recently with editors of the new york times and they're saying you know how can you be

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you know how can you be all of you this blunt talk about i was writing a letter for them you know they were saying it's it's so blunt you know it's it's it's exaggerated you know how can you exaggerate when you're plunging into a war they're saying but everybody's talking about peace yeah they're talking about peace but they're preparing for war well it seems like the country in some ways is in this collective sleep in terms of accepting the rhetoric without really looking under the rock because if you look closely it's clear what you're saying about the preparations for war they're all around i mean people who live adjacent to military installations that i know call us and talk to us about increased fighter activity increased training exercises us forces training in deserts i mean all these yeah in the operation the big pine one and two ocean venture grenadiera one where you have 350 ships 2 000 planes 30 thousand soldiers rehearsing the invasion of nicaragua right of course the reagan administration says that's to put pressure on nicaragua do you have any idea how much that costs to keep 350 ships going around in circles for four straight years it's got to be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars absolutely what about the latest thing we're getting john and we've been getting it and you mentioned that hague was talking about going right to the source in terms of our perceptions of cuba within cuba today they are they have uh implemented are beginning to implement a very serious civil defense program in terms of preparing the island for an invasion yet when for instance we report that people say oh you're kidding me the cubans are paranoid some guy called me in the day and said you reported cuban intelligence said you know you're nuts i mean what are the signs what do you see john that tells you that we are considering an invasion of cuba well this letter that i was writing to the new york times i wrote that that the state department was speaking

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that the state department was speaking contemptuously and the tone of the new york times article about cuba's preparations for war uh was casting the cubans preparations in a paranoid light and saying we have no there's no change they didn't say by the way the state department that they had no plans to invade cuba they said there is no change in our plans which is an interesting statement yes a little circum locution as they say and i wrote and then ortega was in the states saying that the u.s was prepared as of the 15th yesterday to invade nicaragua he didn't say they were going to on the 15th but they were prepared to poise to invade and he got collaborated on that oh he got clobbered by everybody saying that's outrageous and that's it yeah we're into peace yeah they cooked him and i was writing saying hey you know cuba and nicaragua's fears have more credibility than our leaders denials right and then i went on to make the case about the preparations for war the rehearsal for invasion al hague's statements reagan's statements goldwater statements about annexing cuba reagan himself has said that we have to resolve the cuban problem with war and when the speech he gave in miami a year ago now if you're up here it's well in good or if you're in the ivory towers of new york and washington it's easy to sit back in yawn and say come on you know these exaggerated reactions that's what they said about my letters it was exaggerated but you know if you're outside of the country and and you know you're one of the peoples around this clumsy a very very callous giant of a country the united states right you know they have to to take presidents and secretaries of state and top generals and admiral statements at face value they are mortally threatened by our preparations to invade and by our leaders statements it's it's a mortal threat to them to their lives into their society they have to be preparing to die john i wasn't struck by that to a

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john i wasn't struck by that to a really great degree until i spent time in both cuba and nicaragua and i was completely blown over being there listening to my government here making these statements and then watching the response and then not only watching it but feeling it and understanding that the united states

was coming to nicaragua and being all over the country traveling and seeing and talking with people and understanding that when reagan says these things people respond and they have to be taken at face value it seems to be the north american public that doesn't understand the reality of the situation we are the most ignorant people you know on the face of the earth we think you know rich country and because we have television you know we're well informed we don't read our own histories our schools don't teach us our own history just look at some simple facts this country in its 200 year history has over 200 incidents of putting our troops into other countries to force them to our will grenada was one of those incidents we have spent 50 of 200 years at war and we've gone to war every 10 years of the rest we've had 15 wars in each of these wars the leadership has taught us to hate the target people we were taught to hate the cherokees after gold was discovered in georgia to hate the seminole indians after we decided to annex florida to hate the mexicans twice and we annexed texas new mexico colorado arizona and california the plains indians the philippines the spanish the cubans the germans the koreans the vietnamese in each case our leaders exhorting us to their evil and the necessity of doing this or saving lives or whatever now in addition to that the scholars of latin american scholars primarily have counted and documented 780 incidents in which our country forced the leaders of central american countries to accept actions imposed on them by the united states that were in our interest and not in their interests and see up here we're oblivious of all this

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this completely interestingly enough uh people like fidel and maurice bishop for example in the comandantes in nicaragua don't blame the american people they have said time and again the american people are not evil when they have the facts when they're taught the truth they respond with compassion and generosity but the leadership throughout our history has time and again taught us the necessity quote of harsh actions and you know you're talking about people in countries that are forced to die at the age of 30 36 years of age and die miserable death and be be brutalized be killed be raped we're doing it right now in in nicaragua because president reagan doesn't like the sandinistas if we could do a covert action against china for 19 years and then turn around and have them be our great big giant friend that president reagan the anti-communist goes to in a shoei trip to bolster his chances for reelection if we can do that then if we can fight paul pott in cambodia for years and years and years and then turn around a few years later and support him to the united nations then we could just as easily support the santanistas as attack them right there is no rational necessity in what we're doing there it's just a compulsion to violence that certain elements of our government have and that's what we're doing we're brutalizing a country because people just decided we'd do it right i think that's an important point i think to look at the flip-flops in policy and i think the most glaring you mentioned for me as a journalist covering the third world was the covert support and then open support that we now have given to paul pott somebody we condemned i mean in some of the most virulent rhetoric we condemn pol pot as soon as vietnam made the choice to do something about what was happening in kampuchea then pol pot became our friend yeah after paul potted killed three to four million people we we sponsored him to the united nations right i mean for me that's an incredible

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right i mean for me that's an incredible flip-flop john we're out of time and i'd like to mention an event that you're participating in tonight it's the showing of a documentary that's in the progress of being made called nicaragua strategies for peace and john will be there speaking and that is tuesday october 16th that's tonight at ps number one elementary school at 1447 euclid avenue in santa monica that's one block south of santa monica and that's sponsored by a coalition of groups office of the americas committee the concern for central america west side suspect nicaragua task force and the empowerment project and john will be there speaking on the central intelligence agency the program is news feature we have been talking with former cia case officer and head of the angola task force john stockwell for news feature i'm corey dubin good afternoon

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